

Message Text

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E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, SA, IZ, SOV

SUBJECT: SAUDI QUERY ABOUT SOVIETS IN IRAQ

REF: (A) JIDDA 2555, (B) JIDDA 2626

1. SOVIET PRESENCE IN IRAQ INCLUDES APPROXIMATELY 1000 MILITARY ADVISORS, PRIMARILY IN TRAINING AND MAINTENANCE AREAS, AND APPROXIMATELY 2000 CIVILIANS AND TECHNICIANS IN SUCH AREAS AS OIL DEVELOPMENT AND EXPLORATION, IRRIGATION PROJECTS, AND POWER PROJECTS.

2. AS FAR AS WE KNOW, THERE IS NO SOVIET BASE OR BASE-TYPE FACILITY IN IRAQ. THE MOST PERSISTENT CLAIM IN THIS REGARD IS THAT THERE IS A SOVIET NAVAL BASE AT UM QASR. THOUGH THE TINY IRAQI NAVY IS BASED THERE AND SOVIET VESSELS USE THE PORT FOR OCCASIONAL REFUELING, WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT THE PORT IS A SOVIET BASE. OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE IRAQI POSITION IS THAT THEY WOULD RESIST ANY SOVIET
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REQUEST TO ESTABLISH A SOVIET BASE IN IRAQ.

3. SOVIET INFLUENCE. DESPITE A CONTINUING SOVIET PRESENCE IN IRAQ, AND PERIODIC PROTESTATIONS OF FRIENDSHIP AND CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES (AS IN IRAQ'S HOSTING OF A "FRIENDSHIP WEEK" FOR THE SOVIETS RECENTLY, AND ITS SIGNING OF AN IRAQI-CEMA AGREEMENT LAST YEAR WHICH CALLED FOR A JOINT IRAQI-SOVIET COMMISSION TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION), IRAQI-SOVIET RELATIONS HAVE BEEN UNDER SOME STRAIN OVER THE PAST YEAR. WITH THE END OF THE KURDISH WAR, THE IRAQIS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO TAKE A BREATHER AND CONSIDER WHETHER THEY COULD LESSEN THEIR DEPENDENCE ON SOVIET MILITARY MATERIEL. THOUGH THE SOVIETS ARE CONCERNED, AS ARE THE IRAQIS, WITH MAINTAINING A COUNTERBALANCE AGAINST THE IRANIAN ARMS BUILD-UP, AND CONTINUE TO BE A MAJOR IRAQI SUPPLIER OF MATERIEL, ESPECIALLY MAJOR WEAPONS SYSTEMS, THE IRAQIS HAVE EXPRESSED DISSATISFACTION WITH SOME ASPECTS OF THIS ARRANGEMENT AND ARE MAKING A POINT OF TRYING TO DIVERSIFY THEIR ARMS SUPPLY SOURCES.

4. IRAQ HAS PUBLICLY EXPRESSED ITS DISSATISFACTION WITH SOV. TECHNOLOGY AND ITS INCREASINGLY TURNING TO THE WEST FOR THE GOODS AND SERVICES IT REQUIRES FOR ITS AMBITIOUS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS. IT IS ALSO RELYING HEAVILY ON EASTERN EUROPEAN PARTICIPATION IN THESE PROGRAMS. THOUGH SOME CONTRACTS CONTINUE TO GO TO THE SOVIET UNION, THEY ARE DWARFED BY THE BIDS BEING WON BY WESTERN FIRMS AND EASTERN EUROPEAN ORGANIZATIONS.

5. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN SOME POLITICAL PROBLEMS. IRAQ IS ANGERED BY WHAT IT SEES AS SOVIET SUPPORT FOR ITS BITTER RIVAL SYRIA IN SUCH MATTERS AS THE SYRIAN-IRAQI DISPUTE OVER THE EUPHRATES RIVER WATER AND THE RECENT SOVIET ARMS DEAL WITH KUWAIT, WITH WHOM IRAQ ALSO HAS SERIOUS DIFFERENCES. MEMBERS OF THE MOSCOW-ORIENTED IRAQI COMMUNIST PARTY HAVE REPORTEDLY BEEN ARRESTED OR QUESTIONED BY IRAQI AUTHORITIES IN RECENT MONTHS, AND THE SOVIET CULTURAL CENTER AND A SOVIET-BACKED NEWSPAPER WERE SHUT DOWN LAST YEAR.

6. IRAQ IS MAINTAINING MANY OF ITS SOVIET TIES AND WILL
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PROBABLY CONTINUE TO DO SO, ESPECIALLY IN THE GENERAL CONTEXT OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT. IT ALSO CONTINUES, FOR EXAMPLE, TO KEEP APPROXIMATELY 30 OF ITS FOREIGN ASSETS IN COMMUNIST COUNTRY HOLDINGS, INCLUDING THE SOVIET UNION. NEVERTHELESS, IT IS NO LONGER A RELATIONSHIP WHICH CAN BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED BY THE SOVIETS. KISSINGER

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